

PRESS RELEASE

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 6, 2005

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S. KIMBERLY BELSHÉ
SECRETARY

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES SECRETARY CRITICIZES LEGISLATURE FOR SLASHING GOVERNOR'S PROPOSED INCREASE FOR WEST NILE VIRUS

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SACRAMENTO – Health and Human Services Secretary Kim Belshé today expressed concern about California's ability to protect the public from West Nile virus (WNV) after the Legislative Budget Conference Committee last week drastically reduced the \$12 million augmentation in Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's revised budget to fight WNV to \$3 million.

"Mosquito control is our best defense to protect California residents from West Nile virus," Belshé said. "So far this year, West Nile virus has been detected in dead birds, mosquitoes, chickens and a horse in 23 of the state's 58 counties. These cases have occurred earlier than last year. I urge the Conference Committee to reconsider its action. This funding is essential to enhance California's mosquito control efforts and reduce death and illness from West Nile virus. Some of the more vulnerable places, like the Central Valley, don't have means to 'Fight the Bite.' This extra money was supposed to help them."

The \$12 million augmentation was to be used as "one-time" funding to supplement resources of existing mosquito control programs and to expand these efforts in areas of the state currently not covered. In addition, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is predicting that California will be the epicenter for WNV activity in 2005.

WNV spread from six southern California counties in 2003 to all counties in 2004. A total of 830 human cases were reported last year in 23 counties, including 28 deaths.

"We expect significant mosquito activity across the state this year, especially in northern and central California, due to a mild winter, excessive rainfall and warm temperatures," said Kevin Reilly, D.V.M., deputy director of Prevention Services at the California Department of Health Services. "These funds will enhance and expand California's ability to control mosquitoes and protect California residents from the threat of West Nile virus."

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